

# Healthy Teeth for Happy Smiles

## Oral Health Tips for Parents and Care givers



**Department of Health & Family Services  
Division of Public Health**

*The first steps to ensuring your child's oral health is taking care of your own oral health.*

### *Keep your mouth healthy*

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- Cavity-causing bacteria can be passed from parent or caregiver to baby.
- Visit your dental provider regularly.
- Brush and floss your teeth regularly.
- Avoid sharing toothbrushes and eating utensils.

### *A message to expectant mothers*

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- Baby's teeth are forming around the fourth week of pregnancy.
- Take prenatal vitamins.
- Establish a dental home. Visit your oral healthcare provider regularly.
- Brush and floss your teeth daily.
- Be cavity-free at the time of delivery.
- Do not smoke. It causes gum disease which may lead to an early delivery.
- Eat a variety of foods from each of the food groups.



### *Eruption of teeth*

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- Usually between 6 and 7 months of age, your infant's baby (primary) teeth will begin to appear. Although this is the first visible sign of teeth, they began forming before your child was born. The first teeth to appear probably will be the front teeth, either on the top or bottom.
- By age 2 to 3 years, your child probably will have all 20 primary (baby) teeth.

### *Healthy primary (baby) teeth*

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Fluoride in drinking water is most important for a lifetime of healthy teeth. The first step towards healthy teeth is to ask your dentist or doctor if your baby's drinking water has enough fluoride. If it does not, you should give your baby fluoride each day from 6 months of age.

Proper use of the bottle is the next step in preventing dental problems.

- Bottles are used to feed babies who are not yet able to drink from a cup.
- Feed only formula, breast milk, or water from a bottle.
- Offer the bottle only at feeding times. Do not let baby carry a bottle around at other times. A bottle is not a toy or pacifier.
- Sleeping times are not feeding times. Do not put baby to bed with a bottle.
- Putting the baby to bed with a bottle may increase the chance of tooth decay and ear infection.



## *Early Childhood Caries (ECC) Baby bottle tooth decay*

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The baby who goes to bed with a bottle can get painful tooth decay. This is called “baby bottle tooth decay” or “early childhood caries.”

- The sugar in formula, milk, juice and sweetened drinks can decay the teeth if it stays in the baby’s mouth during sleep.
- Do not add sugar, syrups, sweeteners, soft drinks, or honey to the bottle or pacifier.
- If baby needs a bottle at night, fill with plain water; or offer a blanket, stuffed animal, or favorite toy at bedtime instead of a bottle.
- “Baby bottle tooth decay” can be very serious.



## *Time for a cup*

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When your baby is able to sit well, begin offering water from a small cup.

- Be patient...it will take your baby time to learn to drink from a cup.
- As baby gets used to drinking from a cup, offer formula, breast milk or juice in a cup.
- Take bottles away gradually. Most babies will not want to give up the bottle all at once.
- Babies should be drinking from a cup by their first birthday.
- By eighteen months of age, the bottle should no longer be used.



## *Care of teeth begins early in life*

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### *Birth - 1 year*

- Wipe baby’s gums and teeth with a damp cloth or gauze daily.
- Ask your dentist or doctor about giving your child fluoride to build strong teeth.

### *1 - 2 years*

- Gently brush child’s teeth with a soft toothbrush after meals and at night.
- First dental visit for oral exam and preventive health education no later than 12 months of age.

### *2 - 3 years*

- Take child to dentist for fluoride and sealant preventive care.
- Brush and floss child’s teeth after meals and before bed.
- Begin to teach child to brush teeth with soft brush using a very small dab (pea-sized) of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Avoid sweet snacks.

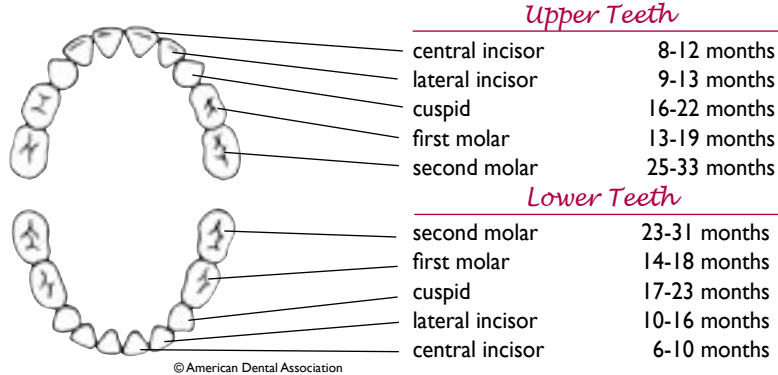
### *3 - 6 years*

- Take child to dentist regularly for fluoride and sealant preventive care.
- Help child brush and floss teeth after meals and before bed.
- Avoid sweet snacks.
- Encourage brushing after eating.

### *6 years and up*

- Remind child to brush and floss teeth after meals and before bed.
- Encourage brushing after eating sweets or sticky foods.
- Take child to dentist regularly for fluoride and sealant preventive care.

## Approximate Age of Eruption Primary (Baby) Teeth



## Signs of teething

Teething may or may not be associated with the following:

Biting or chewing on anything, including fingers.

Drooling, excess salivation.

Restlessness, fussiness, loss of appetite.

A tip for what you might do about it:

Offer a clean, smooth object such as a rubber or plastic ring to help cut teeth and relieve possible gum soreness. This is preferable to using food as a pacifier.

Use a bib to help keep clothes clean and dry. The salivary glands are just beginning to function to help your child digest solid foods.

Don't urge your child to eat just because he/she is crying. He/she will eat when he/she is hungry. Your child may need extra love and attention during teething.

*Your baby is changing and growing in many other ways at the same time teething happens. Parents who see fever, stuffy or runny nose, cough, rash or changes in bowel movements at the same time as teething may think it's all due to teething. These conditions are probably not related to teething, but should be reported to your baby's doctor if they continue.*

## Good Nutrition

Age appropriate nutritious foods and beverages are needed for healthy teeth and gums.

- Encourage good eating habits. Choose a variety of foods from each of the food groups. Set regular meals and snack times.

Good snacks might include: popcorn, cheese, fruit, and dry cereal (low sugar).

- When your child is thirsty, offer water. Avoid sweet drinks such as soda pop, Hi-C, Kool-aid, Tang and fruit punch.
- Brush after eating, especially after eating those foods which stick to the teeth.
- Help your child control a "sweet tooth."

Avoid: candy, cookies, cake, pastries, Jello, doughnuts, granola bars, baby desserts, raisins/dried fruit, peanut butter, syrup, honey, jelly/jam, crackers, soft bread.

## Protect teeth with fluoride and sealants

- Fluoride will help strengthen teeth and protect them from decay. If water in your area does not contain enough fluoride, ask your dentist or doctor about giving your child fluoride drops or tablets.
- Topical fluoride applications such as fluoride varnish help to prevent cavities starting at 9 months. Speak to a dental hygienist, dentist, nurse or medical doctor for advice about fluoride applications.
- Sealants will prevent decay on the biting parts of back teeth. A thin, plastic coating will seal out food and germs that cause decay. Ask your dentist or dental hygienist if your child needs sealants.